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## THE EFFECT OF MODERN BIBLE TEACHING AS SEEN BY THE STUDENT

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The course had been one covering the period from the Maccabean time to the close of the New Testament canon. The students had read Daniel, much of the apocalyptic and apocryphal Jewish writings, and parts of the New Testament. The object had been to trace the history of thought through this period. The question of the bearing of the study on Christian faith had never been discussed in the class. The work had been entirely objective, the only aim being to find out what the facts were. The class was elective from the junior and senior classes of the college. At the close of the course the question given below was appended, for volunteer answer, to the examination. About half the class answered, and the answers are interesting as the spontaneous opinions of students who had evidently given thought to the subject. They are in no case the reproduction of ideas consciously given by the instructor. Selections from the answers follow the question.

Question: What is the effect on Christian faith of a study of the development of the origin of the Christian religion?

"The primary effect of a course of this kind seems to me to be that it forces one really to think and find reasons for her belief or disbelief in certain doctrines which heretofore have been accepted without thought and without question. It revolutionizes our point of view to such a degree that at first one is apt to decide that he cannot believe anything. Facts come so thick and fast at first that they cannot be grasped; but in a short time one gets her ideas readjusted, as it were, and finds that the underlying essential ideas are the same, and can be believed without the additions and changes made by theologians. The essential ideas of Christianity may be a universal appeal to mankind; and in this the course has benefited much, namely, that it has shown us the essentials and enabled us to see what is the ideal in the main, and what creeds have gradually been formed from it."

"The effect on Christian faith of a study of the development of the Christian religion is beneficial (1) in the main. It thoroughly upsets the mythical ideas which an early study of the Bible is apt to inculcate. It is (2) likely, also, to

show one the folly of insisting on minor points of doctrine and dogma, when one realizes that there is no dogma in the New Testament. By showing the unity of the development in the Old and New Testaments alike, it is liable to give one a new admiration for the Scriptures."

"I think the study of the development of Christian thought, such as we have made, is invaluable to one who wishes her religion to be as intelligent and scientific as her other knowledge. It is a study of truth, and even though our faith may include some traditional principles which we find are not founded on the teaching of Christ, and we have to give them up, if we are really seeking for the truth, we are glad to do so. We know better what we do believe and why we believe it, and are able to distinguish between what is essential in our Christianity and what is the superstructure built by Christ's interpreters. It is also very interesting. We have been brought up to certain principles and standards, varying with the times and churches to which we belong, and our home training, and we have judged ourselves and others by them. But after such a study as this, where we find the real, just standard of Christ, many of our former standards are swept away, and we see that others who formerly seemed very wicked, and almost heathen, are as good as we are, and we are not as good as we thought we were."

"Such a study of the development of Christianity is very strengthening to the Christian faith. We are led to see exactly where the authority for our beliefs should lie—in the teaching and life of Jesus. Many of the old conflicting ideas which puzzled and hindered us are thus made clear, because we see that according to Christ they are not essential. It also shows the development of all that is best in the old Jewish beliefs, and the dropping out of the other elements. We see the development in the idea of the Messiah, God's relation to the world, and the need of emphasis on purity of everyday life rather than on the thought of life after death. Thus we see on what deep-laid ideas Christ rested his teaching. He took further steps in the development of the love and righteousness of God and the need for harmony with him. Without such a careful study of each book and its ideas, we should perhaps never stop to think of all that Christ's coming meant to the men of his time."

"Such a study as this has been, of the origin and growth of Christianity, may have various results; I should say, different results according to the different people. The fact that you begin from the very germs of Christianity, back in the Old Testament, must necessarily, I should think, affect your consideration of the New Testament; if you think at all, your former ideas of the Bible get a severe shock, and if you do allow yourself to accept the apparent and obvious, you are considerably broadened as a result."

"The first study of the kind cannot help being very much of a shock, but if sufficient emphasis is placed on the few things which are important after all, one's faith ought not to be shaken. Without such emphasis it may easily lead to indifference or mere intellectual interest."

"By a study of the development of the Christian religion it is possible for us to see on what grounds Christianity is based and to get a basis for our own belief.

We come to realize the different sources, the reasons for development along certain lines, and then can make our own selections."

"I can see how the person who is looking for an opportunity to doubt Christianity and Christ would find that opportunity in such a course as this one, when first he goes through the sensation of having his old beliefs deliberately denied or disputed."

"This course is not only useful, but necessary, to the person who expects or hopes, at least, to be able to meet the questions that will be put to him regarding the testimony both of the Bible and of outside authorities. The strong person can, in the end, only be strengthened by his better understanding of the Bible and by the development of his powers to reason and form his own opinion. The weak person will find no more to meet here than he will, sooner or later, out among people, and here he will find some answer that he may not discover there. Besides, I think a course like this interests one in the Bible, in the study of the original development of a religion, as he has not been interested before, because the view-point is so different and so much more expansive. Faith, sense, and intelligence ought to go hand in hand. Then there can be no danger."

These answers are of interest as showing the thoughtful and practical spirit in which students are meeting the present biblical teaching. They have a special value for the teacher, be he college professor, preacher, or Sunday-school teacher, in two ways:

First, they show how much practical value there is in placing emphasis, as one student says, "on the few things which are important." Religious faith, after all, rests on only a few great things. It behooves the teacher to differentiate these from the great mass of matters of opinion, literary, historical, and doctrinal, with which they are surrounded and easily confused. Many of the answers seem to show that the students have passed through a period of confusion resulting from an implicit assumption of the equal value of everything connected with the Bible. If pastors and Sunday-school teachers will discriminate and put first things first, it will make matters in the college vastly easier for both pupil and teacher. Meantime we teachers in college must see to it that we do not lose our religious emphasis amid the details of literary and historical study. We must not "throw out the baby with the bath."

Second, they show the appreciation of the value of a thorough study. To several of these students it is plain that the second thought has been the thought that counted, and that, with all the care which the instructor could give, first impressions were too often erroneous.

Here seems to be a subject where a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. We must grasp this subject, if we touch it at all, as we do a nettle, so firmly that the sting is crushed.

Other things are also suggested by these answers, but these two seem to me to be chief:

Distinguish sharply between the religious and the literary; between “harmony with God” and the form in which that harmony expresses itself.

Do not play with the scholarly Bible study. Do it thoroughly and carefully, if you do it at all.